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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a strategy for analyzing and improving a college professor's approach to teaching. The strategy uses volunteer observers and a simple checklist, the Teacher Observation Checklist, of positive teaching behaviors drawn from the literature. Since college professors' sensitivity to examination and evaluation is high, this strategy involves observation and feedback without ratings or comparisons to other professors. The strategy is proactive and is intended to make faculty aware of the fundamentals of effective teaching. The brief checklist covers positive classroom personality traits and classroom behaviors. The strategy assumes sharing the completed checklist immediately following the observation and complete confidentiality. A possible scenario using the method would involve a professor having copies of the Teacher Observation Checklist (TOC) distributed to members of a department and professors then inviting a colleague or a department administrator to visit his class and complete the checklist. The checklist is included. (JB)

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Improving College Instruction: A Strategy for Assisting Professors

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Improving College Instruction: A Strategy for Assisting Professors

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present a strategy that may be useful in analyzing or studying a college professor's approach to teaching. The protocol recommended is for professors who volunteer to participate, with a colleague or academic department administrator observing one or more instructional sessions. The role of the observer is to utilize a simple checklist of behaviors developed from the research literature on effective teaching, and check those actions or behaviors of the instructor. This approach to analyzing the performance of professors in a non-threatening manner is intended to be the first step in dialogue between the professor and the observer.

Sensitivity to Evaluation

College professors, like many other educated professionals, have little tolerance for being examined or evaluated. To utilize a direct approach to determine how individual professors compare to a set of criteria would be doomed to failure at the outset. In fact, to make any attempt to modify the classroom behavior of professors at the university level would be considered absurd by some in academe. The following quote from an unknown source clearly communicates the challenge: "*Changing university professors is like moving a cemetery - a very messy affair.*"

Who Will Judge

In most academic organizations the department administrator is held responsible for monitoring the quality of teaching, service and research.

The level of teaching quality is somehow thought to be controllable or modifiable by the "all knowing and wise" department head or chairperson. Many times department leaders have been successful in the classroom and sustain high interest in quality instruction while other administrators have been less successful as teachers and are more focused on other activities. What then? Mohr [1987] aptly explains an attitude or feeling by many professors on this subject ..."I want to be evaluated by people who know they are still learning how to teach rather than by those who think they know how ... " (p. 75).

Proactive Strategy

The position of most department academic leaders is that good planning helps avoid problems. The proactive plan presented in this paper with regard to teaching quality is to somehow make faculty members aware of the fundamentals of effective teaching in a format that avoids ratings or comparisons to other professors. The goal of the academic administrator should be to cultivate an awareness of some tenets of effective teaching in a subtle and indirect manner. The protocol espoused in this paper is to provide a short checklist of effective teaching behaviors that have been found to be related to quality instruction. The old adage of KISS [keep it simple stupid] is recommended. The recommended checklist is appended and available for consideration.

Assumptions and Discussion

In planning and thinking through the recommendations of this paper, several assumptions have been made regarding the nature of the professoriate. Besides the general sensitivity to being judged by someone less informed, another concern expressed by college professors is how

the information that is acquired during classroom visits will be used . In response to these two concerns, the recommendation is made that the observer give the completed checklist to the professor immediately following the teaching session. It should be made clear that the total process and the information gathered is confidential and not to be shared with others, unless the professor who was observed decides otherwise.

The aim of the process that has been described is to make college teachers more aware of variables associated with effective teaching. The following scenario is presented as an example for accomplishing this goal. Copies of the Teacher Observation Checklist [TOC] are distributed to members of a department faculty. The explanation accompanying the TOC indicates that the instrument includes several variables that are related to effective classroom teaching. A professor invites a colleague to assist by visiting a class and completing the checklist. Department administrators may also be asked to observe. Regardless of who plays the role of observer, the checklist is returned to the professor who was observed immediately following the class.

The usefulness of the checklist is intended to occur in the analysis of the completed checklist. If the professor who was observed is completely pleased with the results of the completed checklist then the protocol is ended. However, if the professor has questions or is in need of further explanation regarding those items not checked, then discussions can be intiated by the one observed.

Conclusion

This paper was developed for the purpose of sharing an idea relating to inservice education of college faculty members. Professors in institutions of higher education have great stores of knowledge that should be shared with colleagues to enhance the teaching and learning of students. More teaming and information exchange by teachers at all levels of institutionalized schooling needs to be encouraged and supported. The academic leadership should remove barriers and develop new avenues that bring faculty together for the betterment of student achievement.

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TEACHER OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Directions: The observer is asked to place a check [✓] in the blanks provided to the left of each of the words or statements below. The checklist has been developed to assist teachers in learning about their classroom personality and general behavior as a teacher.

The observer is requested to give the completed checklist to the one observed immediately following the termination of class session. **All information regarding the classroom activities and the contents of the checklist are confidential.**

Further dialogue on the contents of the checklist is at the discretion of the one observed.

CLASSROOM PERSONALITY

____ Open	____ Concern for students
____ Warm	____ Enjoys teaching
____ Enthusiastic	____ Exhibits confidence

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

____ Introductory focus	____ Stays on lesson topics
____ Materials ready for class	____ Responsive to students
____ Interested in subject	____ Terminology is appropriate
____ Knows when students don't understand	____ Uses different teaching activities
____ Provides specifc feedback and praise	____ Involves students during class
____ Non-verbal communi-cation is appropriate	____ Reviews and establishes closure to lesson